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## Can language learning strategies predict Turkish university prep class students' achievement in reading comprehension?

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explain and predict the relation between Turkish university prep class students' language learning strategies and achievement in reading comprehension in foreign language. The subjects participated in the study were 368 university prep class students from eight universities in İstanbul. Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory of Language Learning and the English Language Placement Test, developed by the researcher, were used. The correlation and regression analysis results showed language learning strategies such as cognitive, memory, and compensation predict and have direct influence on the achievement in reading comprehension in foreign language significantly.

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*Keywords:* Language learning strategies, achievement in reading comprehension in foreign language.

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### 1. Introduction

Cohen (2003) describes language learning strategies (LLS) as learning procedures used consciously by learners. Oxford (1999) defines LLS as certain activities, behaviors or techniques used by students to develop their skills in language learning. Wienstein, Husman and Dierking (2000) describe LLS as thoughts, behaviors, beliefs or feelings that help learners transfer new information to other environments. Thus, LLS are methods, techniques, behaviors and thoughts used by language learners to facilitate learning. These techniques facilitate the target language to be internalized, stored, recalled and used by the learners.

Many researchers generated taxonomies of LLS (e.g. Nisbet & Shucksmith, 1986; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo & Kupper, 1985; Oxford, 1990; Stern, 1992; Wenden & Rubin, 1987). When compared, it can be seen that these taxonomies have many similarities. The most well-known is Oxford's taxonomy (1990). It is made up of six strategy classes: cognitive, memory, metacognitive, compensation, affective and social strategies.

To explain the relation between students' LLS and achievement in reading comprehension (AinRC) might be of great benefit for the learners, teachers and researchers. Thus it is reasonable to expect that this might bring academic achievement and efficiency in language learning and teaching. With this study it would be possible to design language programs with regard to the relationship between LLS and AinRC. Finally such a relation could contribute language learning and teaching procedure and direct the researchers to develop new methods and approaches in

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ELT, because in the literature there are many studies showing the relation between LLS use and language achievement (El-Dip, 2004; Gan, Humpreys & Hamp-Lyons, 2004; Ian & Oxford, 2003; Oxford, Cho, Leung & Kim, 2004; Wherton, 2000; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2007; Mori, 2007; Riazi & Rahimi, 2003; Yalçın, 2006; Yang, 2003). The study might also describe the profile of Turkish university prep class students' LLS and how far it would explain the language achievement in reading comprehension. Besides, the researches done so far in Turkey have uncovered the strategy profile of high school and ELT department students in universities (Gorevanova, 2000; Güven, 2004; Karakış, 2006; Tabanlıoğlu, 2003). Therefore the purpose of this study is to explain and predict the relation between Turkish university prep class students' LLS and AinRC in foreign language. Can LLS predict Turkish university prep class students' AinRC?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

The subjects participated in the study were 376 university prep class students from 8 different universities in İstanbul, Turkey. The aspects of subjects are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Aspects of the Subjects

Demographic Characteristics		f	%
Sex	Male	188	50
	Female	188	50
	Total	376	100
Field of Study	Social	187	49,7
	Science	188	50
	Missing	1	0,3
	Total	376	100
University	Government/ Public	188	50
	Foundation/ Private	188	50
	Total	376	100

### 2.2. Measurement

The Turkish version of Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) was used to reveal the students' LLS. For the AinRC in foreign language, the English Language Test (ELT) developed by the researcher was given to the students.

In order to test reliability and validity checks of the scales, SILL and the ELT were applied to the subjects of 768 prep students who were enrolled English Prep Classes in seven different universities such as Yıldız Technical University, İstanbul Technical University, Bogazici University, Maltepe University, Bahcesehir University, İstanbul Bilgi University, and Sabanci University, in İstanbul, Turkey.

For the Turkish version of SILL, translation from English to Turkish then back translation from Turkish to English was done by 5 different English teachers and finally the back translated version and the original one was compared by a native English teacher. No significant difference was reported. Then it was seen that Pearson's correlation between Turkish and English versions of the inventory ranging from, except for the items 5., 12. and 29., 0.38 to 0.91 among the 6 subscales indicated acceptable reliability. The correlations were significant at the 0.00 and 0.01 level. The results of factor analysis for construct validity of the inventory addressed six dimensional constructs with 47 items. The total internal reliability of scale was 0.92 reliability coefficients. Findings demonstrated that the subscales had internal consistency reliabilities, item total correlation, ranged from 0.27 to 0.62. Test re-test reliability for external reliability of subscales was between 0.67-0.82.

For reliability and item reliability of the English Language Test (ELT), the tests and retests were given to prep classes of 83 subjects in Uludağ University in four-week intervals. The average difficulty index was .56 ranging from .31 to .81. The total internal reliability of scale was 0.85 reliability coefficients. Findings demonstrated that the test items had internal consistency reliabilities and item total correlation ranged from 0.75 to 0.93.

### 2.3. Procedures

Turkish versions of the scales and the ELT were applied simultaneously in spring semester in 2007. SILL contains 50 statements and took about 10 minutes to complete. The ELT, has 20 multiple choice reading comprehension questions and lasted 20 minutes to respond.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

First, in order to reveal the relation between Turkish university prep class students' LLS and AinRC variables Pearson correlation was checked. Second, a regression analysis was carried out to define if LLS can predict AinRC.

## 3. Results

The values from Pearson correlation to show the relation between Turkish university prep class students' LLS and AinRC was given in Table 2.

Table 2: Pearson correlation values between Turkish university prep class students' LLS and AinRC

Variables	N	r	*P
Memory strategies <----> AinRC	337	.33	.00
Cognitive strategies <----> AinRC	336	.43	.00
Compensation strategies <----> AinRC	337	.30	.00
Metacognitive strategies <----> AinRC	337	.32	.00
Affective strategies <----> AinRC	337	.24	.00
Social strategies <----> AinRC	337	.25	.00

\*p<.01

As for the findings from correlation analysis it has been seen that there are meaningful relations between Memory strategies and AinRC ( $r=.33$ ,  $p<.01$ ), Cognitive strategies and AinRC ( $r=.43$ ,  $p<.01$ ), Compensation strategies and AinRC ( $r=.30$ ,  $p<.01$ ), Metacognitive strategies and AinRC ( $r=.32$ ,  $p<.01$ ), Affective strategies and AinRC ( $r=.24$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and Social strategies and AinRC ( $r=.25$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

Secondly, for the regression analysis, every LLS listed above are included. The results of regression analysis are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Regression weights for LLS

			Estimates	Standard Error	Critical Ratio	*P
Cognitive	---->	AinRC	10.22	2.53	4.03	.00
Compensation	---->	AinRC	5.55	1.80	3.08	.00
Memory	---->	AinRC	4.96	2.26	2.19	.02**
Metacognitive	---->	AinRC	.20	2.12	.09	.92
Affective	---->	AinRC	-.96	2.20	-.43	.66
Social	---->	AinRC	-.26	2.14	-.12	.90

\*p<.01, \*\*p<.05

As can be seen in Table 3 cognitive, compensation and memory strategies are meaningful predictors of AinRC, whereas metacognitive, affective and social strategies cannot predict AinRC meaningfully. In other words, direct strategies group like memory, cognitive and compensation can predict AinRC meaningfully, while indirect strategies consisting of metacognitive, affective and social strategies cannot.

#### 4. Discussion

It is understood from the analysis results that there are meaningful relations between all LLS scales and AinRC. It can also be said that direct strategies like cognitive, compensation and memory strategies can predict academic success in foreign language and that these strategies affect the AinRC directly. There are other researches with similar results in literature. For example, Nisbet, Tindall and Arrova (2005) examined the relation between LLS preferences and English proficiency of university prep class students and found that the LLS preferences can predict the exam success significantly in their regression analysis. In another study, Jie and Xiaoqing (2006) discovered that the use of LLS by students would predict 4 percent of success in proficiency exam. These results concur with the results in this study.

As it is obvious that LLS explain achievement in foreign language mostly, teachers should integrate LLS instruction into their curriculum, so it will affect the students' success. Researches show that the students who have taken LLS instruction or had the awareness of LLS would succeed more (Brown, 2000; Yang, 2002). In this study, it was also found that, compared to males, females use more LLS. In the same way, they are much more successful in ELT. Besides, it means that using LLS more frequently increases the level of achievement. As for Brown (2000) and Cohen (1998) teaching learning strategies to the students will help them to acquire learner's autonomy and self-regulation and hence increase students' language proficiency. For Brown (2000) and Young (2002) LLS training would be beneficial for the students for several reasons such as that they get to know about LLS; arrange all these LLS systematically and effectively; find out where and when to use them; transfer LLS use to other learning environments. Considerable research has been conducted on how to improve language students' LLS. In many researches, attempts to teach students to use LLS have produced good results (Thompson, Rubin, 1993). LLS training consists of four stages (O'Malley, Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990). They are diagnosis, preparation and awareness raising, instruction or presentation, expansion.

On the other hand, the LLS training still bears the importance in achievement in FL. Many researches produced good results in LLS training (Brown, 2000; Cohen, 1998; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Yang, 2002). Besides, it is important to give LLS training integrated in the course which would make LLS training more beneficial and permanent (Ehrman, Leaver, Oxford, 2003).

To sum up, findings and the results in this study present evidence confirming a relation between LLS and AinRC.

#### 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

According to the findings, following conclusions have been obtained:

Direct strategies consisting of cognitive, compensation and memory strategies are meaningful predictors of AinRC. Therefore teachers should take precautions as to have students make use of cognitive, compensation and memory strategies in foreign language classes. Some suggestions related to cognitive and compensation strategies were put forward for teachers as follows. First, instructors and teachers in university prep classes should get their students to take the advantages of memory strategies such as creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds, reviewing well and employing actions in their language learning process. For example, they should relate the things the students already knew to the things they have just learned and help them gain this as a skill. Besides, they should have their students use the strategy of learning by picturing a possible context for newly learned vocabulary item and the technique of recalling the places (book, blackboard, bulletin board etc.) where they have first met the new words and word groups. In addition, students should use the strategy of relating the pronunciation of the new word to a shape or a picture as a reminder to remember the new words clearly. It is also suggested that teachers should have their students make sentences using the new vocabulary.

Moreover, LLS training should be included into the prep class programs developed by instructors and it should be spread over the whole semester in academic year. It is suggested that in this training course tasks should be practiced with language skills by using the cognitive, memory and compensation strategies.

For educators and teachers, following recommendations could be made based on the results:

In the study, relationships between LLS and AinRC were revealed. Therefore, it is thought that LLS training would influence achievement in foreign language and that researchers should investigate effects of LLS training on achievement in foreign language.

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